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Tuesday, December 20, 2005

Gregoire's ambitious plan to clean Sound

\$42 million spending boost proposed

By [LISA STIFFLER](#) AND [ROBERT McCLURE](#)
SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER REPORTERS

Hoping to rocket the restoration of Puget Sound into national prominence, Gov. Christine Gregoire announced Monday the most ambitious plan to date to clean up toxic dumps around the Sound, prevent oil spills and take other actions to revive the ailing inland sea.

Gregoire's \$42 million proposal would provide a boost to the approximately \$90 million currently earmarked for Sound-related work each year.

Although it represents a big bump in spending, the money is only a modest down payment on a 15-year program to restore the Sound -- to make it once again fishable and swimmable, the governor pledged.

"We must take bold action if we are going to make it thrive forever," Gregoire said.

She warned that it was going to take a diverse coalition of support to get the job done. She emphasized that a restoration would benefit marine creatures and the economy while protecting a resource and the region's natural heritage for generations to come.

"Twenty years of efforts in Puget Sound conservation have taught all of us that government can't alone do what is necessary," she said. "We must engage literally everyone around Puget Sound or who enjoys Puget Sound."

Gregoire has rallied the support of environmentalists, lawmakers, tribes and some members of the business community.

"I just really appreciate having a genuine leader there who's got the guts to attack some of these areas where we've been floundering for a long time," said Sen. Margarita Prentice, D-Renton, head of the committee responsible for creating the Senate's version of the state budget.

Most of the money would come from state and local toxic accounts funded by taxes on petroleum products and dangerous chemicals. The



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Scott Eklund / P-I

Cody Woodruff of Manson Construction sweeps sediment off a dock on the Foss Waterway in Tacoma. As part of the cleanup, Manson Construction was hired to deposit a gravel mixture to cover up some of the contaminated areas.

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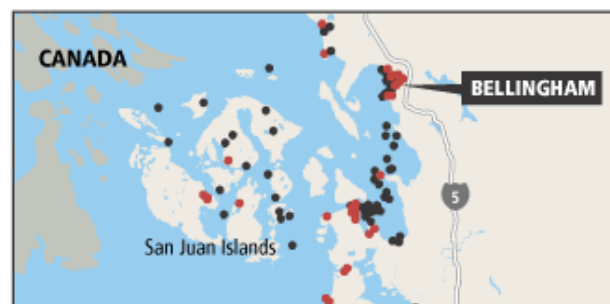
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accounts got a boost in the past year thanks to high gasoline prices, but Prentice was optimistic that they would continue to provide resources for the effort for at least the next couple of years.

Scientists, environmental advocates and others say the biggest future problem the Sound faces is a population boom from 3.8 million residents living around the Sound today to a projected 5.2 million in 15 years. With all those people will come development -- which has traditionally funneled huge slugs of polluted water into the Sound when rain drains off streets, parking lots and other surfaces.

Gregoire's answer is a \$2.5 million allocation for the state to fund projects to illustrate how the flow of polluted water can be slowed. Examples include vegetation-covered "green roofs" that soak up rainwater and permeable pavement that allows water to soak into the ground below it.

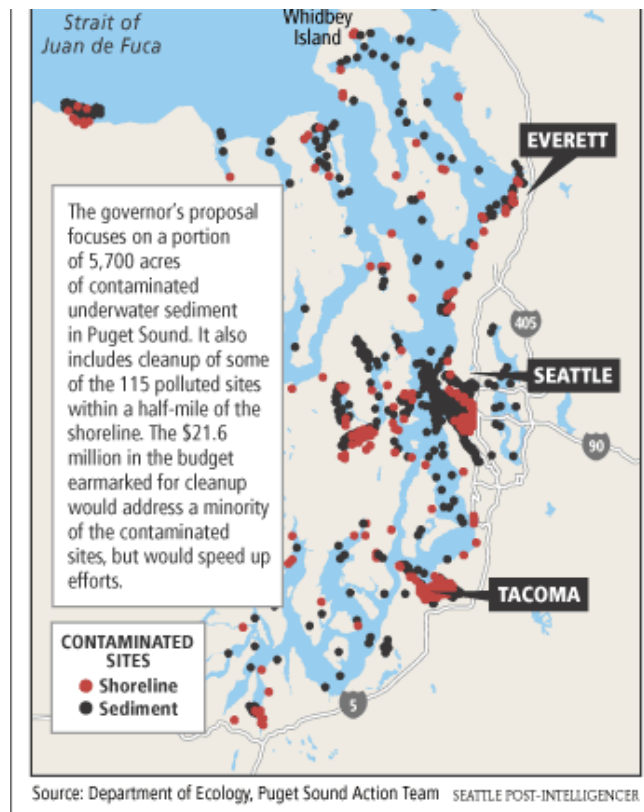
Her \$42 million plan would build on work already under way, ramping up those efforts and strengthening laws to protect the Sound.

About half the funding would speed the cleanup of contaminated mud and polluted land within a half-mile of the marine shoreline. It would pay for only a small part of the estimated \$400 million to \$1 billion needed to clean the most polluted sediment.

Gregoire said she would not push for heavy reliance on new laws or increased enforcement of old ones because "we could do a lot of mandating and get a lot of pushback, or we can come together as a community and come together with a community vision."

The governor announced the creation of the Puget Sound Partnership, a diverse 10-member advisory council that includes herself, elected and public officials, tribal leaders, business interests and environmentalists.

The group is to help educate the public and drum up support for restoring the Sound to a healthier condition. The first task is an examination of what has worked and what hasn't in other large ecosystem restoration projects such as those in the Great Lakes, the Everglades and Chesapeake



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Bay.

By October, the group is supposed to tell the governor what needs to go into an ongoing and sustained recovery effort for the Sound. It is to include recommendations for lawmakers to consider in 2007.

"Then comes the hard part" -- actually getting the job done, said Bill Ruckelshaus, the two-time Environmental Protection Agency director who has spearheaded the state's salmon-recovery efforts and is a member of the council.

Of the other big restoration efforts, Ruckelshaus said, "The one thing they all have in common is that none of them have succeeded.

"In short, it will take a miracle," Ruckelshaus told Gregoire. "But in this season of celebrating miracles, you have challenged us, governor, to create another one."

Other council members include Rep. Norm Dicks, D-Wash.; University of Washington President Mark Emmert; King County Executive Ron Sims; Billy Frank Jr., chairman of the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission; Kathy Fletcher of People for Puget Sound; Mike Shelby, executive director of the Western Washington Agricultural Association; Bill Taylor of Taylor Shellfish Farms Inc.; and Colin Moseley, president of timber firm Green Diamond Co.

Dicks predicted that the announcement Monday is one "we will look back on as a turning point for Puget Sound."

He said the coordinated program Gregoire is building "gives us an opportunity to argue to EPA that we have not gotten the resources the Chesapeake Bay and the Great Lakes have and that Puget Sound has not gotten the level of federal support it deserves."

Dicks' involvement is key because he is the highest-ranking Democrat on the House subcommittee that funds the EPA, and he has a track record of getting money for his home state. Last year, he secured a \$1 million appropriation for Puget Sound restoration, the first of its kind to date.

"It sounds like we're finally going to get the attention that the Great Lakes and Chesapeake Bay have," environmentalist Fred Felleman said, "but that's only possible through the stewardship of Norm. He's obviously decided that the Puget Sound legacy is something he wants."

And the Sound's advocates and researchers emphasize that urgent action is needed to maintain that legacy, as ominous news about the Sound's health keeps surfacing.

In November, the local orca population was declared endangered, joining



Gilbert W. Arias / P-I

Gov. Christine Gregoire jokes with Rep Norm Dicks, left; Billy Frank Jr., chairman of the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission; and King County Executive Ron Sims during a news conference announcing her Puget Sound cleanup plan at the Bell Conference Center in Seattle.

the Sound's chinook salmon as a species considered at risk of extinction. Shellfish across thousands of polluted acres are unfit for humans to eat. Nearly half the populations of seabirds in the Sound have shown serious declines.

The Hood Canal -- a long, largely pristine fjord with poor circulation -- has been plagued in recent years by oxygen levels so low that fish and other marine life have suffocated. The problem is attributable in part to nutrients leaking from septic systems and agricultural practices, feeding algal blooms that die and strip oxygen from the water. Gregoire's plan would lend money to homeowners to fix aging septic systems such as those that pollute Hood Canal.

Multiple efforts are under way to protect the Sound, but none has delivered the kind of results needed to turn the problem around.

The Puget Sound Action Team, a government agency, was created two decades ago to help direct preservation and restoration of the Sound, tracking its health and reporting on the progress of efforts to help the water body.

Since 2002, a federal and state partnership called the Puget Sound Nearshore Restoration Project has conducted research for strategies for restoring local marine waters.

This fall, a mix of agencies, non-profit groups and businesses began discussing ways to boost the national prominence of the plight of the Sound. At a September meeting in Seattle, they tried to put a price tag on the effort, settling on a rough estimate of \$10 billion over 20 years.

Those working on restoration say that because the Sound has not been completely trashed, an investment such as this should provide strong returns, provided it's done strategically and on a large enough scale.

"The cleanup initiative is so important to all of us," said Frank, of the Fisheries Commission. "It isn't a case of can we do it; we have to do it.

"This Puget Sound is our nest -- all of our nests. And it's asking for help."

ON THE WEB

- Learn more about Gov. Christine Gregoire's \$42 million proposal for recovering the Sound's health at goto.seattlepi.com/r48

FOLLOWING THE MONEY

Most of the \$42 million boost to restoring and protecting Puget Sound would come from state and local toxic accounts funded by taxes on petroleum products and dangerous chemicals. Here's where it goes:

- **\$21.6 million** for cleanup of polluted marine mud and shorelines, with a focus on Bellingham Bay, Port of Tacoma, upland sites near the Sound and state-owned aquatic lands.
- **\$6.5 million** in loans to homeowners and businesses upgrading septic systems.

- **\$4 million** for sewer upgrades at state parks located near the Sound.
- **\$3.25 million** for restoring estuaries, shorelines and areas inhabited by salmon.
- **\$2.5 million** for local grants funding projects to control storm water.
- **\$2 million** to remove more toxic creosote logs from beaches.
- **\$1.9 million** to bolster oil and hazardous-chemical spill prevention and response, including more storage sites for spill cleanup materials and inspections of oil transfers.

See the P-I's enviro Web page: www.seattlepi.com/environment P-I reporter Lisa Stiffler can be reached at 206-448-8042 or lisastiffler@seattlepi.com.



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